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Ministry of Advanced Education

TOP GRADS HONOURED, NEW AWARD ANNOUNCED

VANCOUVER – Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell presented awards today to the province's top high school graduates last year – chosen for their excellent grades, service to their communities and involvement in extra-curricular activities – and announced a new category for a student with a disability.

"The Premier's Excellence Awards recognize young British Columbians from all over the province who are both outstanding students and model citizens," Coell said. "I congratulate each of this year's winners for what they have already achieved, and look forward to the contributions they will make as they progress through their post-secondary education and on to exceptional careers."

The awards include a medal of recognition and a $15,000 scholarship to attend a public post-secondary institution in B.C. The government tripled the amount of the scholarship in 2005, the first time it had been increased since the Premier's Excellence Awards were established in 1986. To date, more than $2.2 million has been awarded.

This year, for the first time, nominations have been accepted for a Premier's Excellence Award for a Student with a Permanent Disability.

"This new scholarship recognizes a student who has overcome the challenges of their disability to excel in academic studies while being fully involved in their communities," Coell said. "Creating this special category is another way this government is building the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities."

Each January, high school principals in the province are invited to nominate the student in their school who has demonstrated academic excellence in grades 11 and 12, as well as high levels of involvement in extra-curricular activities in their schools and communities

A committee including representatives from the ministries of Advanced Education, Education, and Employment and Income Assistance, as well as retired educators, picks the top student in each of the province's 15 college regions. Students receive their scholarship cheques once they have enrolled in full-time studies at a B.C. public post-secondary institution. They may also defer their scholarship for a year, which one student has opted to do this year.

"The students receiving their Premier's Excellence Award medals today have demonstrated amazing academic abilities and concern for their communities," Education Minister Shirley Bond said. "They are the leaders of tomorrow – the doctors, scientists, engineers and others who will make a difference to our province, and perhaps to the world."

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The Premier's Excellence Award encourages high-achieving B.C. students to continue their post-secondary education in British Columbia. Since studies show graduates often pursue careers close to the institutions where they earned their degrees, this award increases the likelihood that B.C.'s top high school graduates will stay here to become part of the province's highly educated workforce.

Other scholarships offered through the ministry include the Queen Elizabeth II B.C. Centennial Scholarship (including a major scholarship of $60,000), and Pacific Leaders fellowships and scholarships for future public servants and children of provincial government employees. In addition, government has endowed the Irving K. Barber B.C. Scholarship Society to provide scholarships for students transferring within the public post-secondary system, students who will be studying abroad and Aboriginal students. Details are online at www.studentaidbc.ca.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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BACKGROUNDER

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2007-08 PREMIER'S EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS

Blair Browning was the top Grade 12 academic student and the top science student graduating from Quesnel secondary school in June 2007, and is also an outstanding athlete, highland dancer and artist who painted two murals for her school. Blair won the University of British Columbia – Okanagan Entrance Scholarship and the Dr. McIntyre Memorial Scholarship, as well as the School District 28 Principals and Vice-Principals' Association Scholarship. She was also given a Team Allstar Award for basketball in the zone finals – a week after her second knee surgery to repair a sports injury. Blair plays ringette and volleyball as well as basketball, has coached and refereed, and was a team captain for the B.C. Cancer Society's Annual Relay for Life. Blair is studying human kinetics at UBC-O and plans a career in sports medicine.

Rozalyn Chok of North Vancouver graduated from Sentinel secondary with the Governor General's Academic Medal for achieving the highest average in her graduating class. She performed with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra after winning the 2007 Bösendorfer National Piano Competition, and has played with the Vancouver and Seattle symphonies, as well as the Canadian Music Competition Gala Concert Orchestra after winning that competition in 2006. She will make her European debut in Vienna this summer. Rozalyn has also won the BMO Financial Group National Scholarship, the University of B.C. President's Entrance Scholarship and the Telus University Scholarship. She coaches volleyball, plays piano and organ at her church, works as a volunteer tutor, and raised $23,000 for the Stephen Lewis Foundation through Telus's matching donation program for the Give a Day for World AIDS campaign. Rozalyn is studying science at UBC, has done laboratory research at the James Hogg iCapture Centre for Cardivascular and Pulmonary Research, and intends to become a pediatrician.

Erin Crockett of Vernon graduated from Kalamalka secondary school. He was a freestyle ski instructor and a leader on the school's senior soccer team, as well as being a nationally ranked tennis player, member of the Tennis BC provincial team, and volunteer tennis coach for children and wheelchair athletes. He played piano in the school senior jazz band and combo, performing at fundraisers, jazz festivals and community events. He has served on his school's student council, organized activities for Grade 8 students as a member of the Safe Schools Team, and raised money for charity through SPAM, the Social Political Awareness Movement. His academic awards include the BMO Financial Group National Major Entrance Scholarship to UBC, the Shad International Merit Scholarship and the B.C. Hydro Scholarship. Erin's goal is to become a doctor or a veterinarian.

Savanna Gibbon, who graduated from Salmo secondary school, has consistently been top student of the year, and was awarded the Governor General's Academic Medal and the University of Victoria President's Entrance Scholarship. She and a friend organized a 30-Hour Famine at her school to raise money for World Vision, and also organized a food drive for the local Salvation Army. Savanna went to Cuba on a school trip and helped paint a school for Cuban children with asthma and diabetes. She was the lead flutist in her school's jazz band, plays volleyball, basketball and softball, and was her curling team's skip. Savanna is enrolled at UVic in pre-commerce, and intends to become a financial adviser.

Lawrence Haiducu graduated from North Surrey secondary school as class valedictorian, after being the top academic student every year from Grade 8 to Grade 12, with marks ranging from 98 to 100 per cent, and winning awards from every department within the school. Lawrence is also dedicated to helping those less fortunate than himself. His family emigrated to Canada from Romania, and to help students at the elementary school he attended in his birth country, Lawrence started Project Maple Leaf, sending packages of toys and learning materials, as well as a learning magazine he created. He also founded the Tanzania Project, which raises money for children who have lost their parents to AIDS, and was president of Harmony in Action, a multicultural group that organizes charity projects. He was captain of his school's cross-country track and field team, a MathCounts team coach and a volunteer library reader to young children, as well as a writer for the CARS BC website that promotes safe driving. Lawrence has worked at Simon Fraser University as an assistant lab technician, and is now studying science there. He plans to become a pediatrician.

Dena Javadi of Coquitlam graduated from French immersion at Dr. Charles Best secondary school, and has been the top academic student in her class since Grade 9, with average marks throughout all her schooling of over 97 per cent. Fluent in French, English and Farsi, Dena won UBC's Hugh M. Brock National Scholarship, the UBC President's Entrance Scholarship, the Governor General's Academic Medal and the Youth in Action Award. She plays piano and flute, sings in a choir, is vice-president of the school's music council, does volunteer tutoring and also volunteers for Oxfam. Her sports are badminton, swimming and skating. Dena was co-president of her school's environmental club, and organized a "Yellow Fish" storm drain marking day for children as a member of the Vancouver Aquarium's Aquatic Conservation Team. Her goal is to become an environmental researcher.

Brandon Kootnekoff graduated from Grand Forks secondary school as the top student in his class, with 12 scholarships and awards, including the UBC President's Entrance Scholarship, the B.C. Innovation Award, the Governor General's Academic Medal, the Miller Thomson Foundation National Scholarship, the Council of Forest Industries 2007 Convention Legacy Scholarship, the Canadian College of Teachers Greater Vancouver Chapter Scholarship, and music and peace awards. He helped organize the Terry Fox Run and other fundraising events, and played first trumpet in the Jazz Club, which raised money for hospice and cancer research. He has volunteered at community events that promoted multiculturalism, as well as at the SPCA. Brandon intends to become an environmental scientist so he can help preserve and manage the natural environment.

Simran Lehal of Williams Lake graduated from Columneetza secondary school with a 98 per cent average, consistently winning her school's top academic student award. She founded a local youth arm of Rotary, called Rotaract, where she led a project that provided malaria nets to Tanzanian schools, orphanages, hospitals and jails, as well as raising money to build a school for Kenyan youth. She was also an in-school mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters, and was a founding member of the Williams Lake Red Awareness HIV/AIDS Team. She spent three weeks working at the James Hogg iCapture Centre for Pulmonary and Cardiovascular Research at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver after being chosen for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of B.C. and Yukon's summer research program. Simran won the Governor General's Academic Medal, the Canada Millennium National Excellence Award, the University of Northern B.C. President's Entrance Scholarship and the Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life Loran Finalist Award, as well as the UNBC Leadership Award and the University of Calgary's Chancellor's Club Scholarship. She plans to finish sciences at UNBC, then enrol in graduate studies to prepare for a research and university teaching career in northern and rural biomedical health.

Tribesty Nguyen of Campbell River graduated from Timberline secondary school with awards including a Coastal Community Credit Union scholarship, a Daybreak Rotary scholarship, a Catalyst Paper scholarship and a President's Entrance Scholarship to the University of Victoria. Tribesty was the editor of the Timberline yearbook, treasurer of the Interact Club, concertmaster for the Rockland Beach senior strings ensemble, a Relay for Life captain, and nominee for Campbell River Youth of the Year.

He volunteered for four years at the Sunshine Lodge, an extended-care unit for seniors, and received a grant from the Coastal Community Credit Union to complete a memorial/family garden at the lodge. Tribesty attends UVic, where he is working towards a B.Sc. in biology and to satisfy requirements to attend medical school. He plans to become a doctor, and to work or volunteer in a Third World country soon after he graduates.

Emily Palibroda graduated from French immersion at North Peace secondary school in Fort St. John as the top academic student. She is also a runner who races regularly, trains at least five days a week, both cross country and road running, as well as track and field, in which she coached and mentored children. She played flute in the school band for six years, and taught the instrument to new band students. In Grade 11, she created a children's book on deforestation, using clay figurines and photography to illustrate a story that would raise youngsters' awareness of the issue. She helped her father take community members on dogsled tours for fun, worked with her mother to set up a classroom and prepare materials for children with disabilities, and tutored a boy with autism, in French. Emily won the Gordon M. Shrum Scholarship and is taking general science courses at SFU before deciding on a major. She hopes some day to take part in a program like Engineers Without Borders.

Kulveer Singh Parhar graduated from Nanaimo District secondary school as class valedictorian with an academic average of over 98 per cent throughout high school. He is fluent in English and Punjabi, and founded a Punjabi language school in which he taught students of varying ages, races and skill levels. Kulveer volunteered at the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital and the City of Nanaimo Youth Council, as well as refereeing youth soccer, coaching elementary school basketball and acting as an in-school mentor through Big Brothers Big Sisters. He was also captain of his school basketball team, and played on both the high school and Nanaimo rep soccer teams. Among his scholarships were the UBC Major Entrance Scholarship, the UBC President's Entrance Scholarship and the Miller Thompson Award; he also received a Loran Finalist Award. Kulveer is studying science at UBC and wants to become an oncologist.

Angela Tam of Kitimat graduated from Mount Elizabeth secondary school as class valedictorian, and has been the top student in her class ever since Grade 8, winning academic proficiency and citizenship awards at both the junior and senior high school level. She plays and coaches soccer, basketball and volleyball, and also volunteers as a tutor at the Kitimat Valley Institute and the Kitimat Public Library and a helper at the Kitimat Centennial Museum. Throughout high school, she tutored a total of eight other students, averaging eight to 10 hours per week. She also belongs to the B.C. Youth Parliament, which organizes charity events to fund a summer camp for disadvantaged children, and founded Key Club International, a volunteer-based high school organization connected with the Kiwanis Club. Angela is enrolled in UBC's Sauder School of Business, where she is exploring her interests in accounting, marketing and finance.

Annelies Tjebbes of Vancouver graduated from French immersion at Kitsilano secondary school, after spending Grade 10 in Dutch immersion in Holland. She plays field hockey, volleyball, basketball, soccer and ice hockey on school and community teams. She also plays piano and has won French public speaking contests. She has volunteered for the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Girl Guides, founded an Ecological Footprint Team, coached basketball, and mentored younger students through her school's Link Crew program. Annelies, who intends to become a civil engineer, won the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of B.C. University Entrance Scholarship, as well as the Ecole Polytechnique Memorial Fund Scholarship from B.C. Hydro, the Miller Thompson Foundation Scholarship, the Governor General's Academic Medal, the Earl Keeley Memorial Scholarship, and several entrance scholarships to UBC. Annelies is an active member of Engineers Without Borders and plans to travel to Africa after earning her bachelor's degree to volunteer helping communities improve their quality of life through technology.

Petra Villette graduated from Rick Hansen secondary school in Abbotsford with a 99 per cent average in her final year, including a perfect score on her Math 12 provincial exam, which earned her a provincial government scholarship. She was top academic student in her school every year since Grade 7. Petra volunteered at the local hospital and as a peer mentor through Big Brothers Big Sisters, and acted as a peer mediator and mentor at Rick Hansen. She was also a photographer for the school yearbook, wrote columns for the Journal of High School Science, was a peer instructor for the beginner band program, and was president of the Matsqui Busy Hands 4-H Craft, Sewing and Photography Club. She plans to continue studying science at UBC, and to eventually obtain her PhD so she can conduct research and possibly teach.

Editor's note: Photographs of the recipients are available on request.

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